

VIDEO

FAQ

Q Is there a way of scheduling recordings on Windows Media Center via the internet?

A A free program called WebGuide 4 (www.asciexpress.com) can do just this. Once installed on your Media Center PC, you can access the Media Center application using a web browser. You can create or modify scheduled recordings, whether you are using a laptop in the bedroom, or you're in an internet café on the other side of the world. Better still, WebGuide can stream live TV or recordings across your network or the internet. Over your network, you can watch the full uncompressed TV recordings, while WebGuide transcodes video into WMV files for streaming over the internet. You can also access all your music and photo files remotely, perfect for showing friends and family your holiday snaps at short notice.

Seth Barton

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D-LINK DSM-510

★★★★★

£161 inc VAT

From www.b4udirect.com

Most media streaming devices look like DVD players or hi-fi components in order to better blend into their living room surroundings. D-Link's DSM-510 takes a different approach, though – it looks more like a wireless router. It's the smallest media streaming device we've ever seen, measuring only 31x111x143mm. It may not stack neatly with your hi-fi components, but it could stand inconspicuously next to your TV.

Its small size limits the space available for video and audio outputs. There's an HDMI interface with support for resolutions up to 1080i. A 3.5mm mini-jack outputs composite video and phono stereo through a special lead. A SCART adaptor is also provided, but there's no RGB support, so CRT TV owners are stuck with poor-quality composite video. If your HD TV doesn't have an HDMI input, you should look elsewhere, as the DSM-510 doesn't have a component video output. An optical S/PDIF is provided for outputting digital sound to a surround-sound amplifier.

The DSM-510 is easy to set up and works with any UPnP server, including the one that is built into Windows Media Player 11. It's also compatible with Intel's Viiv technology, though this standard never really took off, and we doubt that many people have a Viiv-compatible PC and router to take advantage of it. You can connect the DSM-510 to your network via 802.11g wireless or by using the wired Ethernet port, but there's no



Draft-N support. Alternatively, you can attach a portable USB storage device and play content from that.

The interface is clearly laid out and quick to navigate. All the common video file types are supported, including DivX and XviD. However, we were disappointed by the lack of support for super-efficient H.264 encoding. Cleverly, the DSM-510 will also recognise and stream TV recordings made by Windows Media Center. Video quality was good across all our test files, as long as

we were using the HDMI output.

This DSM-510 supports a wider-than-usual range of image formats, including TIF, GIF and PNG, as well as the usual JPEG. We appreciated that thumbnails are shown, as well as basic slideshow options. Photos are scaled to fit your TV's resolution without any jagged edges or artefacts.

Music support is impressive, too. There's the usual MP3 support, and playlists are recognised from almost any media player except iTunes. You can also play Wav, WMA (with or without DRM protection) and Ogg Vorbis files.

This is not the cheapest media streaming device we've seen and it lacks new features such as Draft-N wireless. However, it has a terrific interface and file support, excepting H.264, is excellent. If you don't need that, the DSM-510 is a fine choice. Vista users should wait until next month, when we will be reviewing the new Linksys Media Center Extender.

Seth Barton

SUMMARY

- ✓ Great interface
- ✓ Very small
- ✗ No component or RGB SCART

STREAMING MEDIA PLAYER Requires Windows XP/Vista, 1GHz processor, 512MB RAM. HDMI, SCART, composite, optical S/PDIF and phono stereo outputs, USB, 100Mbit/s Ethernet and 802.11g interfaces
PART CODE DSM-510
DETAILS www.d-link.co.uk

Also consider...

TERRATEC Cinergy DT USB XS Diversity

★★★★★

£58 inc VAT

From www.pixmania.co.uk



This USB TV tuner has a diversity mode that takes a signal from two tuners and aerials to improve reception in areas with weak signal strength. Alternatively, you can use the tuners independently to receive one programme while recording another.

The included software is easy to use, image quality is good, and the remote is clearly labelled. The XS Diversity is the best dual tuner we've seen.



USB TV TUNER USB2 interface, dual digital tuners, 2x RF inputs
PART CODE 10456 **DETAILS** <http://uk.terratec.net> **FULL REVIEW** Apr 2007

CANON HV20

★★★★★

£559 inc VAT

From www.dabs.com



The HV20 is our favourite high-definition camcorder. It's affordable, but it doesn't sacrifice video quality and supports exciting new features such as progressive scan. You'll get excellent-quality footage in almost any situation.

It's easy for beginners to use and has enough manual controls to capture the best images in trickier conditions. The HV20 stores its video footage to old-fashioned MiniDV tapes, but don't let that put you off.



HD CAMCORDER MiniDV storage, 10x optical zoom, 1/2.7in 2.96-megapixel CCD, 2.7in LCD screen, HDMI, component, composite and phono outputs, USB2 and FireWire interfaces
PART CODE 2060B006AA
DETAILS www.canon.co.uk
FULL REVIEW Oct 2007

Battery life 93m
-50% Reference +50% +100%

COMPRO

VideoMate Vista T500F

★★★★★

£45 inc VAT

From www.overclock.co.uk

We've tested just about every application for watching TV on your PC, but our favourite is still Windows Media Center. As it's preinstalled on most Vista PCs, it has become tough for TV card manufacturers to differentiate their products.

Compro has clearly addressed this difficulty with its new VideoMate Vista T500F. It comes with a Media Center remote control, an accessory most Vista PCs lack. It's different from Microsoft's design. The big, black, slab-like shape doesn't fit comfortably in the hand, and the four-way navigation control is a bit awkward to use. However, it does a perfectly good job of controlling Media Centre and has all the buttons you need, including the green button. There's no IR blaster unit for controlling a set-top box, but an infrared receiver for the remote plugs into the rear panel of the card.

The card fits into a PCI slot and has a single hybrid digital/analogue tuner, so those still relying on the main five analogue channels are catered for, as well as those wanting to watch the extra channels available on Freeview. There's also an FM support, as well as an input for analogue video capture. A breakout lead is supplied with composite, S-video and stereo mini-jack inputs. It's also good to see Ulead's DVD MovieFactory 5 SE included for editing your footage and burning it to DVD.

Even if you're just buying a tuner to receive Freeview, there's a choice of viewing options here. The T500F works perfectly with Media Center, but there's also Compro's DTV application. This is not as slick



as Media Center, with fiddly controls and a poorly designed EPG that displays only one multiplex of channels at a time. There's also a Vista sidebar gadget provided, but given its limited options you are better off reducing Media Center down to a small window instead of running it full-screen.

One advantage of using the DTV software is that it can use the card's hardware power control. By daisy-chaining your PC's power switch through the card, DTV can switch your PC on and off to match your scheduled recordings. It's potentially useful if you spend long periods away from home, especially as the DTV software can access scheduled recordings from Media Center. However, most users will find Media Center's use of your PC's hibernate function just as useful, and it starts up quicker when required.

A Microsoft-branded Media Center remote costs around £20, which means you're effectively paying only £25 for the TV card. It's a shame that this isn't a dual-tuner card, but if you only need a single tuner and don't already have a Media Center remote, the T500F is great value.

Seth Barton

SUMMARY

- ✓ Remote included
- ✓ Hybrid card with video capture
- ✗ Poor tuner software

INTERNAL TV TUNER Single analogue/digital tuner, PCI interface, RF, FM, S-video, composite, mini-jack and IP inputs

PART CODE T500F
DETAILS www.comprousa.com

CHOOSING A...
DV Camera

Follow the steps to find your ideal specs

CCD: 800,000 pixels**ZOOM:** 10x optical/300x digital**VIDEO PORTS:** USB out, S-video out**MONITORING:** Mono viewfinder, 2.5in colour LCD**MEDIA:** MiniDV tape**STILLS CAPTURE:** 640x480 to tape**EXTRAS:** Remote control

Recommended minimum in grey

1 If you just want to make home movies, a digital video (DV) camera with the specs above will be fine and cost around £160. A range of auto-exposure modes will ensure you get decent results in all conditions. The LCD provides easy playback on location, while the remote control allows for comfortable viewing on the sofa. If you'll be using the zoom a lot, concentrate on the optical zoom specification. Check the battery life, which should preferably be 90 minutes or more, and consider budgeting for an extra battery.

2 To edit video, get a model that provides DV-in. You can transfer edited footage back to MiniDV tape and run off VHS copies through the camera's S-video out. Cameras with S-video in can often be used to capture analogue video.

3 Enthusiasts will pay extra for a more flexible camera. Good manual focus and a colour viewfinder make for better camerawork, an external microphone transforms your audio and good battery and charger options keep you filming for longer. A high-resolution CCD might improve video quality, but while this and a flash memory slot will make your DV camera double as a digital camera, quality will be basic. For the best-quality video, look for a model with three CCDs. This gives more realistic colour reproduction and reduces picture noise to a minimum.

4 Miniature DV cameras, especially those that use tiny MicroMV tapes or memory cards, may tempt gadget-lovers, but picture quality could be compromised. Cameras that replace tape with a hard disk or DVD are more useful, making your footage more manageable.

5 If you're serious about film-making, £1,500 buys you a DV camera with superb optics, three CCDs and the requisite connectors to attach equally expensive professional AV accessories. High Definition camcorders are available, and worth considering if you have an HD TV.

TOP UP TV
TUTV Anytime DTR

★★★★★

£100 inc VAT

From www.topuptv.tv

This hard disk Freeview recorder has twin tuners, so you can watch one programme while recording another. It also has a 160GB hard disk, which is enough to store over 100 hours of recordings.

As well as the usual Freeview broadcasts, you can opt to receive additional Top Up TV programming downloaded to the hard disk for £10 a month. This is an inexpensive way for you to better enjoy your TV viewing.



HARD DISK RECORDER 2x digital tuners, 160GB hard disk, RF input, RF output, 2x SCART, S-video, composite, stereo phono and coaxial S/PDIF output **PART CODE** DT1 6300-16 **DETAILS** www.topuptv.com **FULL REVIEW** Jul 2007

CANON
MD101

★★★★★

£140 inc VAT

From www.jacobsdigital.co.uk

The MD101 is a great camcorder, at an extremely low price. It has a widescreen LCD, which means that what you see on the screen is what you get on your TV.

Picture quality is excellent in good lighting conditions, with realistic colours and very little noise. Only the lack of a USB port is disappointing.



DV CAMERA MiniDV storage, 30x optical zoom, 1/4in 0.8-megapixel CCD, 2.7in LCD screen, phono and composite output, FireWire interface **DETAILS** www.canon.co.uk **PART CODE** 1881B007AA **FULL REVIEW** Aug 2007

Battery life 100m
-50% Reference +50% +100%